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AUTHOR Schardt, Molly; And Others
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ABSTRACT

This packet accompanies a slide series designed to introduce students to the Islamic influence on Asian art. The packet includes an essay introduction to the early history of Islam and its beliefs, maps of the region, suggested activities for students, stories and illustrations of patterns and figures used in Islamic art, Islamic coins and design, a bibliography for further research, the slide list, slide descriptions and slide script. (EH)

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TEACHER'S PACKET

THE ISLAMIC ARTS OF ASIA

A Teacher Workshop on APRIL 29, 1995

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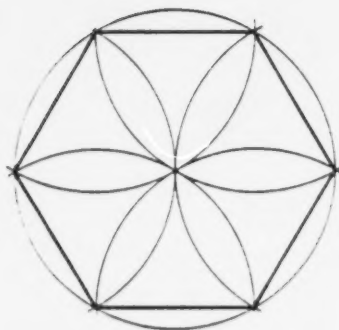
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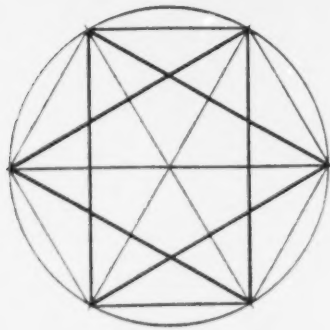
Prepared by Molly Schardt, School Program Coordinator.
Written by Diana Fish, Adjunct Curator, and Maxine Morris.
Michael Morrison, Editorial Assistant.

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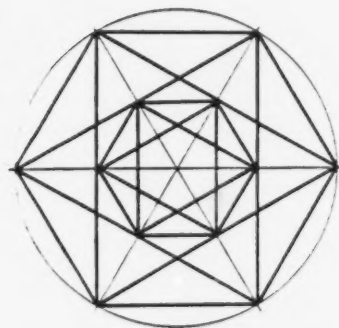
Circular Islamic Designs



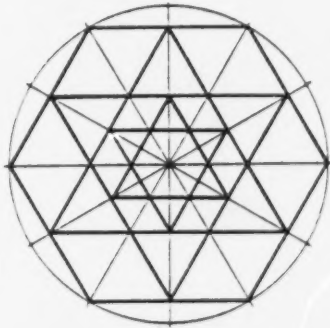
The circumference of a circle can be divided into six equal parts by its radius. When the six points set off on the circumference are joined by straight lines a hexagon is produced.



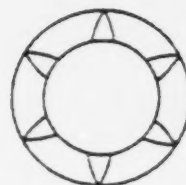
When alternative points are joined by straight lines two triangles are produced which together make up a six-pointed star.



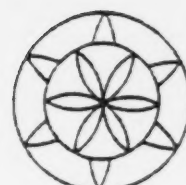
The ratio between the diameters of hexagons based on concentric six-pointed stars drawn from the hexagon's corners is 1:2.



When the concentric stars are drawn from the hexagon's midpoints, the ratio between the heights of the hexagons is also 1:2. The ratio between the diameter and the height of a hexagon is $\sqrt{3}:2$.



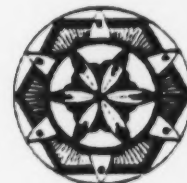
Step 1



Step 2



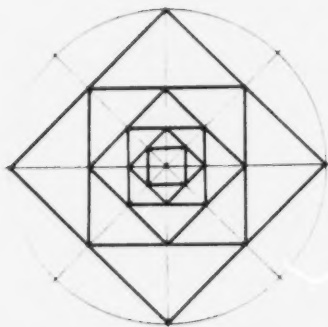
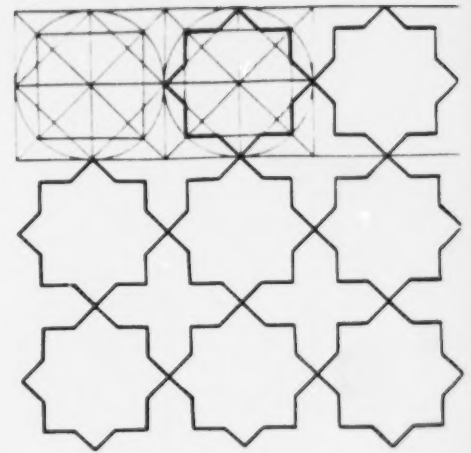
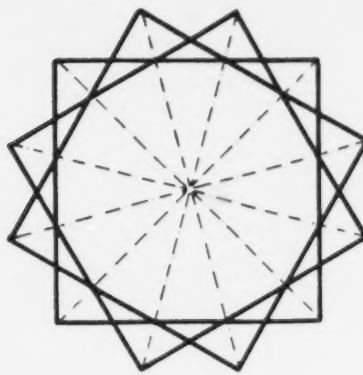
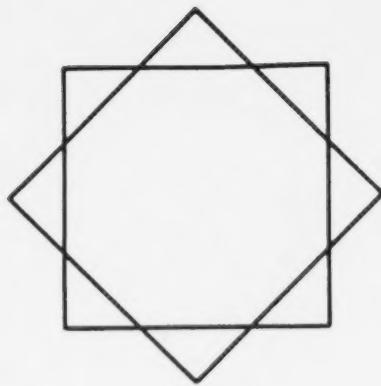
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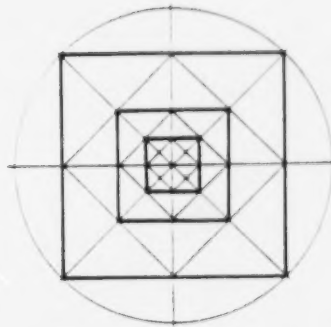
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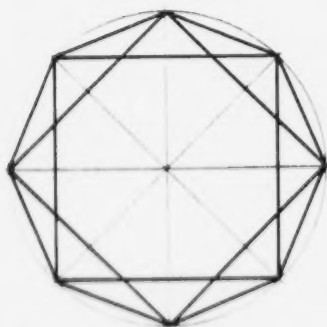
Squared Islamic Designs



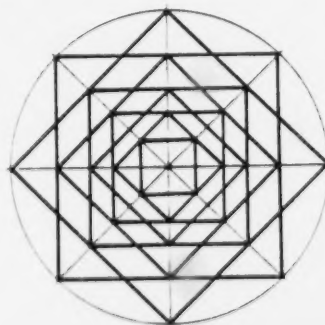
When lengths of the sides of concentric squares inscribed in a circle are related by the proportion of $1 : \sqrt{2}$ the areas are progressively halved.



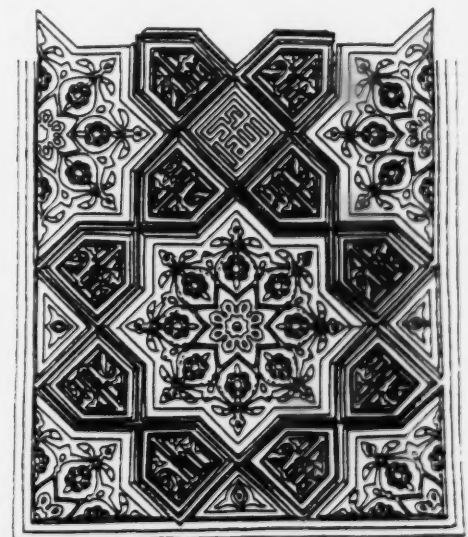
When the length of the sides are halved the areas are quartered.



The octagon and the eight pointed star.



When eight-pointed stars are set consecutively so that the lengths of consecutive parallel sides are related by the proportion of $1 : \sqrt{2}$, lengths of alternative sides are halved.



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ISLAMIC COINS

Asian Art Museum Workshop Notes
Ibrahim and Pamela Sharp El Shayeb
San Jose State University
April 29, 1995

A Little History of Coins

Metal coins were invented in ancient Sumer, a civilization that flourished about five thousand years ago in what is now Iran, in the Middle East. The idea of coins made from precious metals spread from Sumer to all of its trading partners throughout the Middle East and around the Mediterranean Sea. The first coins issued as official money of a government were made about 600 BC in the ancient kingdom of Lydia, a land located in what is now Turkey. Each Lydian coin was guaranteed to be of an exact weight and purity. The coins were made of a mixture of gold and silver called electrum. The lumpy, bean-shaped coins were stamped with a lion's head - the mark of the king of Lydia. The people trusted the king so they trusted the money.

In time, the use of coins as official money was adopted by other governments. The ancient empires of Greece and Persia, and later Rome, all developed systems of coinage. In the earliest issues of coins we find images of natural objects such as turtles and leaves. Later coins showed religious themes and historical events as well as portraits of great leaders and warriors.

After the Moslem conquest of the Middle East and the Roman provinces of Africa, Egypt, Palestine and Syria in the 7th century, the monetary policy of the new government was to leave the coins as they were. But many of these coins had pictures of figures on them and Moslems, at that time not wanting to include images of people in their arts, began to make changes. Coins began to have inscriptions only.

The inscriptions on Islamic coins often include the name of a leader or ruler, the person who is guaranteeing the value of the coin, and short religious phrases. As time went on, the inscriptions became art forms in themselves.



70 mithqal piece, silver, Husayn Shah,

1709 (1121 H.), Isfahan

ISLAMIC PERIOD

British Museum.

Making a Model of an Islamic Coin

The purpose of this activity is to help youngsters become familiar with the designs found on Islamic coins and to use those coins as windows for learning about Islamic peoples.

Materials: Handouts of Arabic alphabet and pictures of Islamic coins.

Supplies: Heavy aluminum foil, tag board, paper napkins, scissors, scratch paper, pencils, pens, plastic spoons or tongue depressors, black ink or acrylic paint, sponges.

Activities:

1. Show slides or pictures of Islamic coins. Talk about the designs which are primarily made from Arabic letter forms and geometric decorations.
2. Talk about the development of coins and how the value of coins in early times depended greatly on the trust people had in the issuer of the coins, often an individual ruler.
3. Suggest that students may want to create their own coinage in the Islamic style, using Arabic letter forms to spell their own names on the coins and finishing designs with simple designs made from natural forms (other than the human form) and geometric forms.
4. Using the Arabic alphabet, have students try to write their names. Remind them that Arabic is written from right to left. Point out that each letter has four forms: an isolated form, an initial form, a median form and a final form. For instance, the letter B looks like this all by itself , like this when it is the first letter in a word , like this when it is in the middle of a word , and like this when it is the last letter . Letters are strung together as are the Roman letters in our own handwriting. The dots are very important so don't ignore them! Arabic doesn't have a 'P' but it can be written almost like the B by adding three dots instead of only one, like this:    
5. Have students make small coin-sized circles on their scratch paper and put their Arabic name in the circle. Suggest that it is OK to make some changes in the letter forms to make them fit in the circle, since after all, they are the designers! Suggest that they add simple geometric designs or natural forms to their design.
6. When students are happy with their design have them make their coin:
 - a. cut a circle of foil about one half inch larger in diameter than the coin design.
 - b. on a scrap of foil, placed on the soft surface of a folded paper napkin, practice using a pen or ball-point pen to make lines and shapes that are both raised and depressed in the foil by drawing on each side of the foil.
 - c. place the foil circle on the napkin and copy the design, leaving a 1/4 inch margin all around the circle.
 - d. cut a piece of tagboard the same size as the design (smaller than the foil).
 - e. place the tagboard circle on the back of the foil design and using a plastic spoon or tongue depressor fold the edges of the foil around the tagboard, giving the coin some thickness. Smooth down any rough places with the side of a pencil or pen.
 - f. create a look of age by painting the coin with black acrylic paint and rubbing it off almost immediately, leaving paint only in the depressed parts of the design.
7. Close the lesson with a comparison of the newly designed and 'minted' Islamic coins, looking at all the different letter forms and decorations. Talk about how students might use the coins in a classroom economy! Compare the coins to real coins. Talk about the designs to be seen on our own coins and how they are alike and unlike the Islamic coins.

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INTRODUCTION

Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam, was born in 570 in the small Arabian trading center of Mecca. He spent some of his adult life as a Meccan merchant coming into contact with the religious ideas of Bedouin tribes, Jewish and Christian communities living along the caravan routes to Syria, and perhaps other more obscure groups. In this atmosphere the middle-aged Muhammad became fascinated by monotheism — the worship of the same God we know from Judaism and Christianity — and while deep in prayer heard the voice of an angel calling him to prophethood. This and later revelations were collected in the holy text of the Muslims, called the *Koran*. Together with Muhammad's own teachings, it formed the basis for the religion known as Islam. While recognizing Abraham, Moses, and Jesus, the *Koran* calls Muhammad the "Seal of the Prophets," God's last messenger on earth.

The first Muslims (this word meant "one who submits to the will of God") energetically spread their religion in the politically weak areas to the north of the Arabian peninsula. The Sassanian kingdom in Persia and the Byzantine Empire were so exhausted by years of warfare, both civil and international, that they could offer no effective resistance. Within less than 100 years after Muhammad's death in 632 A.D., the Arab armies of Islam had conquered an area from the Atlantic shores of Spain to the frontiers of India. From this point, one may speak of Islam as a religion and of Islamic civilization, which is the result of the conquest of

much of the world by a few thousand Arab soldiers. Before this amazing military feat, all Muslims were Arabs and all Arabs lived in or very near to the area which today is called Saudi Arabia. The Arabs conquered other peoples who were not Muslims and did not speak Arabic — such as the people of Morocco, Egypt, and Iraq. Over the years, these non-Arab people converted to the new religion, Islam (which is related to the word *Muslim* and means "submission to God"), and learned to speak and/or read the Arabic language (slide 6).

Other peoples conquered by the first Muslims accepted Islam as their religion but continued to speak in their original language. These people considered themselves Muslims but would never say that they were Arabs. The Persians, Pakistanis, and Indonesians of today are such peoples. Therefore, Islamic civilization was created not just by Arabs but rather by many different people — all adding to the common culture from their individual "national" backgrounds. Just as Europeans, Chinese, Japanese, Africans and other groups have all contributed to American culture, so did Egyptians, Turks, Persians and Indians contribute to Islamic culture under the banner of Islam.

One of the best ways to understand this melting together of many different cultures is by analyzing the art works produced under Islamic civilization. The broad heading "Islamic Art" covers the architecture, painting, ceramics, metalwork, textiles and other media of

thirteen centuries or so of artistic activity from Spain, Africa, the Middle East, India, and much of Asia. The questions now arise: "What unites all of this art? Why is it all called Islamic Art?" The one thing all of these areas shared over these centuries was that Islam was the official state religion. Most inhabitants, including the ruling class, professed Islam as their religion and shared certain practices and beliefs. The relationship between church and state was similar to that in Christian Europe prior to the Protestant Reformation.

Diverse Muslim lands were held together by common religious traditions, law based on Muslim concepts, and knowledge of Arabic (the sacred language of the *Koran*). Throughout the Muslim world, people were and are united by their religious duties: praying at five specific times a day; "witnessing" that there is no god but God; fasting during the holy month of Ramadan (pronounced: *ROM-ma-don*), giving alms to the poor and unfortunate (charitable generosity); and making at least one pilgrimage to Mecca to walk around Ka'abah (pronounced: *kah-ah-bah*), Islam's holiest shrine.

Was Islam strong enough to influence even the kinds of paintings an artist would make or the style of ceramics a potter would produce? At times yes, at times no. There was a certain unity in the use of abstract, repeated ornament (such as the famous arabesque) and Arabic calligraphy, but in general Islamic art is characterized by great diversity. Some works reflect the religious teachings or ideas of Islam, some transcend them or reflect the survival of pre-Islamic beliefs.

It was not that Islam as a religion influenced all works of art, but that Islam as a civilization created an artistic atmosphere conducive to many art forms. The prosperity of Islamic civilization stimulated the growth of the arts and for centuries provided the political stability necessary for the

creation of great art. Cities and royal courts flourished, attracting artists, poets, and philosophers even from faraway lands. Craftsmen, writers, and intellectuals obtained financial support (commissions, patronages, etc.) as well as artistic and intellectual dialogue with their peers. Islamic civilization also brought many diverse cultures together by expanding trade and improving commercial relations among Muslim lands and also between Europe and Asia. For centuries, the Muslims reaped huge fortunes by controlling this trade, and Islamic art reflects this financial wealth and cultural vitality. The importance of commerce is suggested by modern words derived from Arabic or Persian such as *traffic*, *bazaar*, and *tariff*.

One area that perhaps best illustrates the wealth and diversity of Islamic culture is Persia, or as it also is called now Iran (slides 11-16). As was said earlier, the Persians were not Arabs. Before being defeated in battle by Arabian Muslims in 637, they had boasted one of the oldest and finest civilizations in world history — one that had conquered Babylon and rivalled the Greeks from Pericles to Alexander the Great. With the coming of the Arabs and Islam, the Persians did not by any means forget their pre-Islamic heritage, but incorporated their traditions within the context of the Islamic world and enriched Islamic civilization. Within two hundred years not only were Persians guiding the Muslim government from their positions as advisors to the non-Persian caliph (the political and spiritual leader of Islam), but were playing a dominant role in a thriving Islamic civilization. Because of their high level of education and culture, Persians were able to adapt to any take-over by military conquerors (e.g., the Seljuk Turks, the Mongols, etc.) and "Persianize" the invaders. In this way, Islamic Persia was able to retain its identity and interact with the cultures with which it came in contact.

Among other peoples were Turkic tribes that migrated west from their steppe homelands in Central Asia to conquer western Asia in the eleventh century, thereby ushering in a millenium in which Turkic peoples would exert major influence in politics as well as art. At first it had been Arabs who had spearheaded the spread of Islam; as Turkic peoples were converted to Islam, they too became its champions and helped in the territorial expansion of Islam. The Turkish Ghaznavids (slide 8) helped spread Islam in northern India and became great patrons of art from their capital in what is today Afghanistan. Islamicized Turkic peoples also moved into Anatolia in what is today Turkey. The great Ottoman Empire based in Istanbul (old Constantinople) was a force to be reckoned with in Europe, North Africa, the Mediterranean, and Western Asia. Articles of Ottoman manufacture are some of the most visually arresting in this packet (slides 19 and 20).

In the thirteenth century, the Mongols and then their Il-Khanid successors brought the Pax Mongolica to many lands including Persia and helped foster the popularity of Chinese images (see slide 18, Arts of Persia packet). Later, Timur (d. 1405), who claimed descent from Chinggis (Genghis) Khan, and his Turkic-Mongol supporters established a large empire. Their steppe roots were overlaid with trappings of civilized Islamic culture. This is revealed not only in such nomadic carry-overs as tented pavilions in garden enclosures but also in the beautifully painted gold and blue portable mosque he took with him on his travels and campaigns. Precious jades, some from China, appealed to the princely tastes of these people (slide 17).

The Mughals (after a Persian word for Mongol) transplanted Persian styles to India where a very distinct art evolved. Muslims had been in India long before, and Islamic rulers

combined Persian and local traditions (slide 18). Islam also spread to Southeast Asia by way of Indian ports. Mosques are one of the most visible signs of this presence today in Indonesia, which has the largest concentration of Muslims in the world.

Much art is thought to have an Islamic flavor because it reflects certain Muslim attitudes. According to this view, art should concern itself with the glorification of God and his Holy Word as found in the *Koran*. Muslim art generally avoided depicting people because Muhammad traditionally was said to disfavor such figurative images. The abstract geometry of calligraphy — used to write the sacred words of God — became the highest art, a fact reflected in the importance of the written word as an art form (slides 4 and 6). Space-covering abstract designs also were important for mystical contemplation and enjoyment (slides 5, 15, and 16). Geometry was appreciated for its logical, ordered perfection which seemed to surpass human thought and which reflected the beauty and wisdom of Allah, the "Great Architect of the Universe" (slide 5). Until recently, art historians have tossed off much of Islamic abstract designs as simple repetitive decorations, but now we are beginning to find the sophisticated equations in the designs, which were intended to remind the viewer of God's order in nature and our lives. The purpose of artists in this society was to see that "the visible world was [to be] made to correspond to the invisible world and that there is nothing in this world but that it is a symbol of something in that other world" (al-Ghazzali, d. 1111).

Orthodox Islam, however, did not dominate the art to the extent that artists were limited only to themes of purely Muslim content. Motifs, representing time-worn beliefs, were recognized as everyday symbols and often used in art. Persians, for example, commonly saw images of a king on horseback (repre-

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senting nobility and power) or a bird (a symbol of good luck) adorning pottery and metalwork (slide 7).

Many such popular motifs appear on art objects in the following slides. They blend with designs more consonant with Islamic orthodoxy and with art influenced by neighboring, non-Persian cultures. It is from this mixture that one can begin to appreciate the complexity and vitality of Islamic civilization.

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RUGS

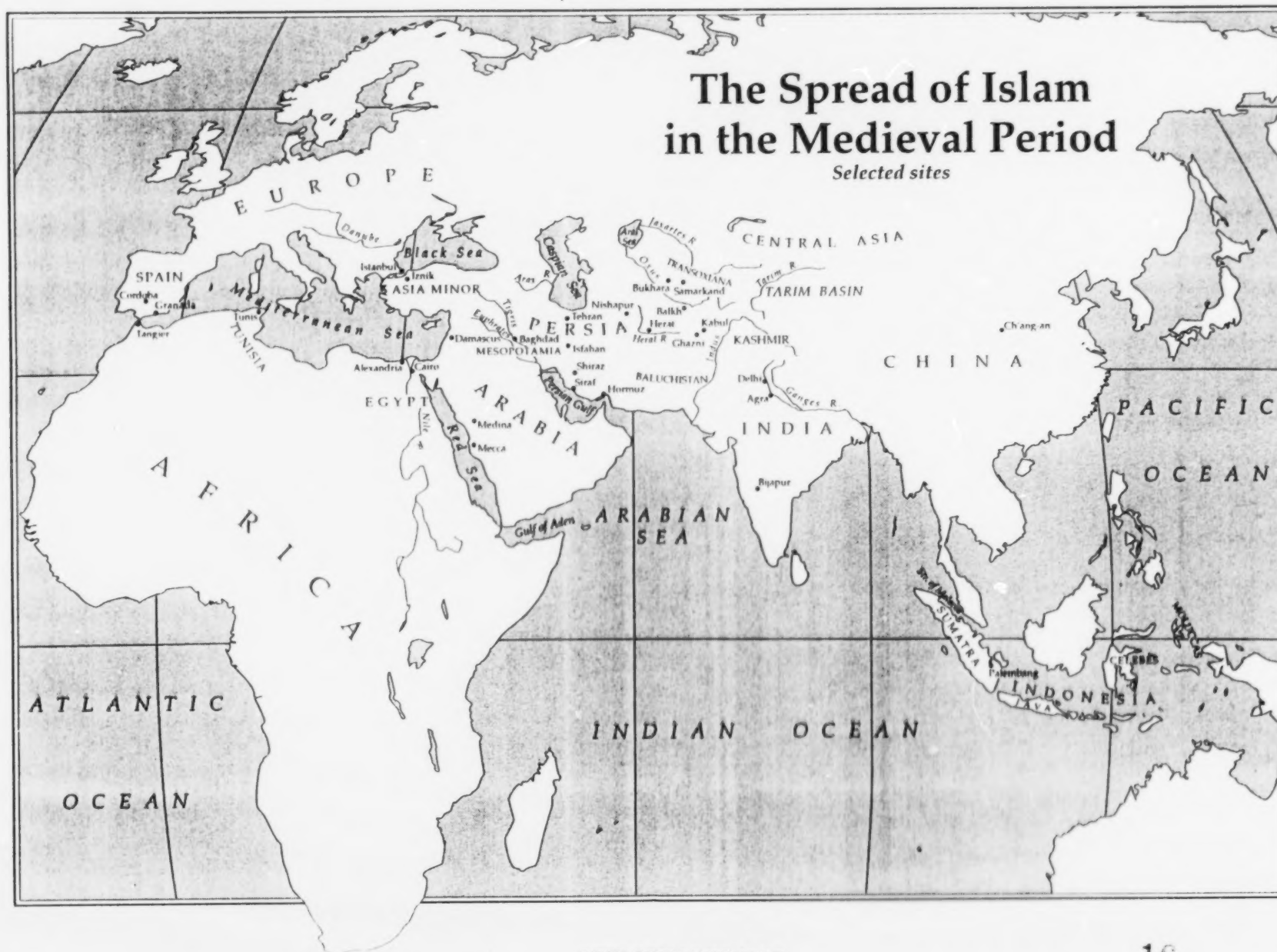
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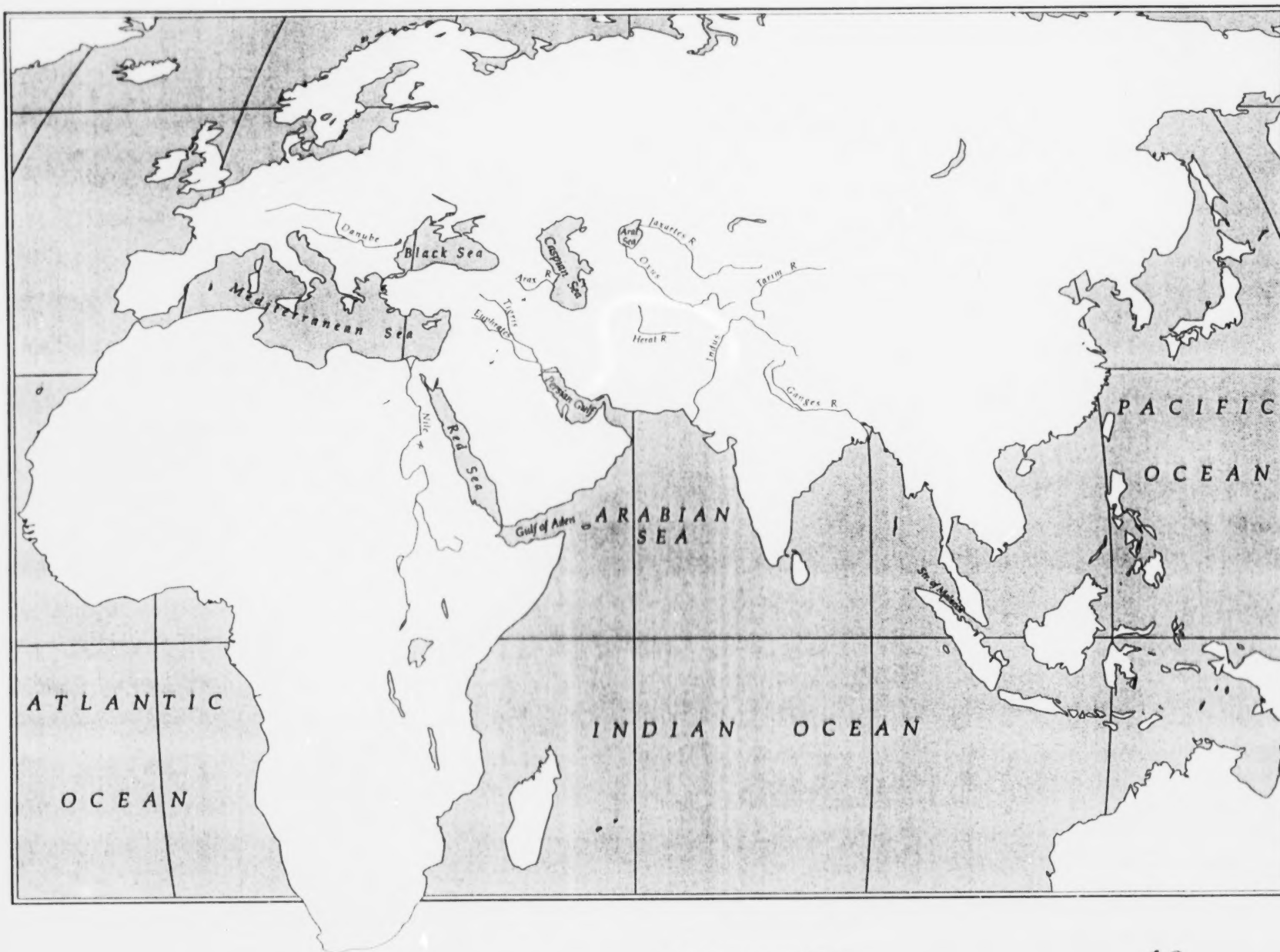
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THE ISLAMIC ARTS OF ASIA

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

1. Discuss stereotypes.

Do we have stereotypes of the Islamic world and the people in it?

If so, what?

Does this packet present ideas that contrast or reinforce any previous ideas students may have had?

Have the students generalize about the arts of Islam and the Islamic world based on what they have seen in this packet.

2. Design all-over space-covering geometric ornament in the Islamic mode.

Use common classroom tools such as pencils, rulers, compasses, and protractors.

Step one: Divide a square piece of paper into four columns and four rows, to produce sixteen equally sized squares.

Step two: Now let each student experiment to see how complex the design can become by adding diagonal lines in different directions, circles, half circles, quarter circles, triangles, etc.

(See diagrams included in this packet for examples).

Compare the results with Islamic ornament.

Does any student wish to add a plant motif or feel the need to add a recognizable element from the real world? If so, why?

What is the effect of the multiplication of abstract patterns?

3. Have the class do a series of arabesques:

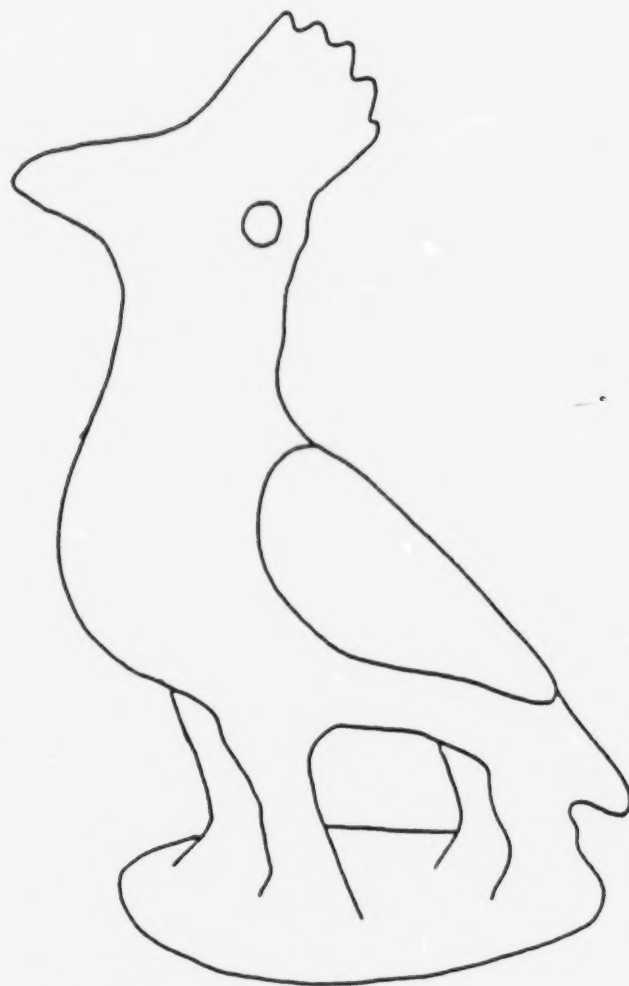
Drawing one: Create an undulating grapevine that extends in a horizontal band across the width of the paper.

Drawing two: Prune off many leaves (or feel free to change the leaves to smaller leaves) and all of the grapes so that the vine stem shows as an up and down, curving line with scrolling branches.

Drawing three: Now add birds or animals of your choice in every available space. Or make each scrolling stem end in the head of a bird or animal. Students should also feel free to add fantastic creatures and imaginative, unrealistic flowers. After students have drawn the outlines, colors can be added.

Now look back at slides 5, 10, and 15. Have students analyze what effects the Islamic artist wanted to achieve.

4. **In many cultures calligraphy has developed into a great art form.**
Why is it important in Islamic art?
Identify other cultures where it has been important and make comparisons.
5. **Discuss symbols, metaphors, and allusions.**
What examples have we seen in this packet?
Do we use symbols and emblems today (e.g., flags, etc.)?
6. **How does the art in this packet show the contributions or influences of diverse Islamic cultures?**



Drawing of Slide 13. Figure of a Bird; Hoopoe or *Simurgh*. 13th century A.D. (B60 P2197)

Here we have a rare example of Persian sculpture in the round. We don't know what it was used for. The hoopoe is considered to be a very wise, clear-sighted bird. It occurs in the Koran in a story about Solomon. The *Simurgh* is an imaginary, mystical bird. This sculpture is not only decorative, but invokes qualities of good fortune.



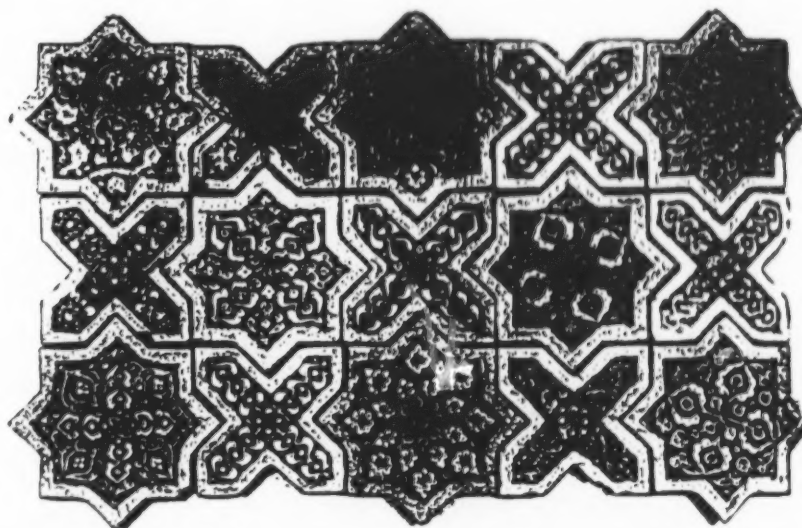
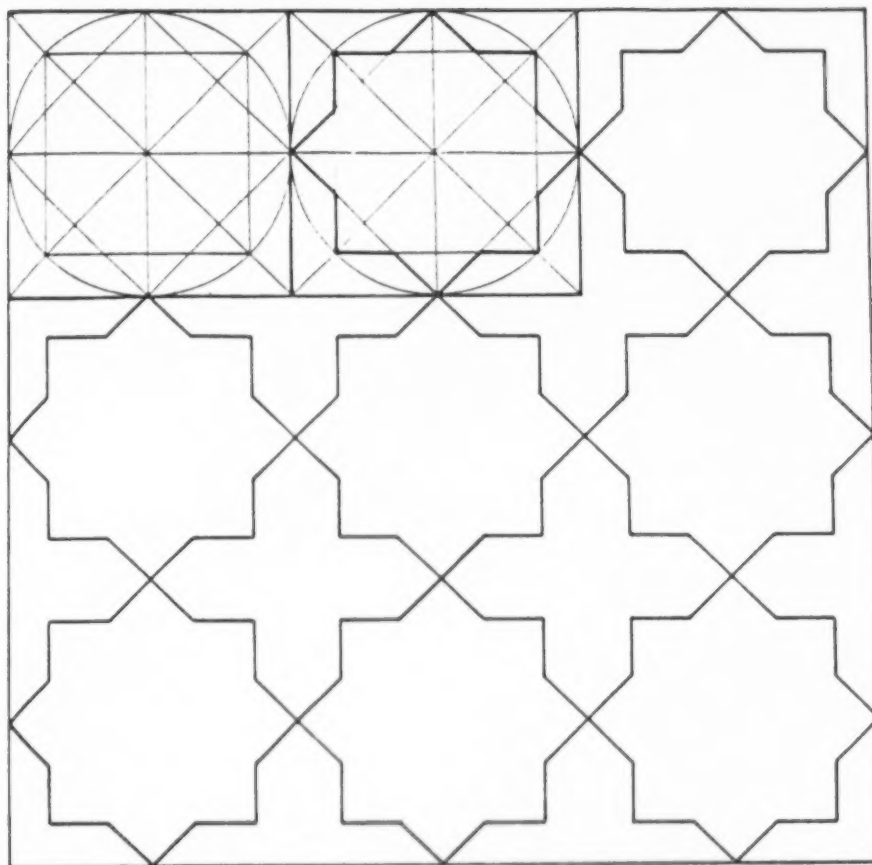
Drawing of Slide 15. Bowl with Arabesque and Endless Knot Design.
ca. 13th century Persia (B60 P1863)

A particularly lovely use of the arabesque is seen in this polychrome bowl. They are entwined with mystic, or endless, knots. This symbol for infinity was also used on Mongol coins. The lush vines appear to grow out of the central star. One can envision the design radiating outwards through infinity. It is painted with different colors including red, blues, and even gold.



Drawing of Slide 20. Large Dish with Cypress, Tulips and other Flowers. Iznik, second half of 16th century, Turkey (B60 P1949)

The Turks of the Ottoman Empire liked richly colored pottery with bold designs. At this time there was contact between the Ottoman Empire and Europe. The naturalism of the cypress tree, tulips, and bluebells reflects western influence. However, this plate's composition, with its centrally framed cypress tree, mirror framing elements, and use of a few elements to suggest a profusion of plants, declare its Near Eastern heritage.



**EIGHT-POINTED STAR TILE PATTERN
HOW TO MAKE IT AND HOW IT WAS USED**

Illustrations from Issam El-Said and Ayse Parman. *Geometric Concepts in Islamic Art*. p13.
and Richard Ettinghausen and Oleg Grabar. *The Art and Architecture of Islam* p. 350.

THE ISLAMIC ARTS OF ASIA

SLIDE LIST

1. **Muhammad in the Cave**
Mughal School, dated 1720
Ink and colors on paper
H: 19 3/8" W: 10 7/8"
North India B81 D34
Gift of George Hopper Fitch
2. **Prayer Rug**
19th century, silk
L: 71 in. W: 48 in.
Turkey B72 M2
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Willard Caro
3. **Masjid-i Shah, the Royal Mosque**
Isfahan, 1612; Safavid dynasty
Brick and glazed tiles
Persia
© Dr. Howard Mitchell
- 3A. **Dome of the Masjid i Shah**
© Dr. Howard Mitchell
4. **Tile from a Prayer Niche**
Molded earthenware decorated with
luster and underglaze blue
Kashan style, ca. 1220-1230
H: 12 in. L: 37 in.
Persia B60 P2134C
5. **Bowl**
Earthenware decorated with luster
9th-10th century
H: 3 in. Diam: 10 1/2 in.
Persia or Iraq B60 P478
6. **Bowl with Kufic Script**
Earthenware decorated with slips
9th-10th century
H: 4 1/4 in. Diam.: 15 3/4 in.
Samarkand area, Transoxiana
(Central Asia) B60 P1862
7. **Bowl with Horse and Rider**
Glazed earthenware with underglaze
slip decoration
Nishapur, 9th-10th century
H: 3 1/4 in. Diam.: 7 1/4 in.
Eastern Persia B60 P1886
8. **Architectural (Dado) Panel with
Persian Inscription**
Marble with pigments
From the palace of Sultan Mas'ud
III (r. 1099-1115), Ghazni, 1112-
1113
H: 29 1/4 in. W: 17 in.
Afghanistan B87 S3
Gift of Shawn and Brook Byers, and
Peter Marks in honor of Avery
Brundage's Centenary Year
9. **Madresh**
Isfahan
11th-12th century with later
additions, Persia
© Dr. Joanna Movassat
10. **Incense Burner**
Bronze
ca. 12th-13th century
H: 9 1/2 in. Diam.: 5 1/4 in.
Persia or Syria B69 B12
Gift of the Asian Art Foundation of
San Francisco
11. **Blue and White Bowl**
Earthenware decorated with
underglaze blue, incised and
pierced designs
Seljuk, 12th-13th century AD
H: 3 in. Diam.: 6 1/2 in.
Persia B60 P1974

12. Mortar with Ring Handles

Bronze
Seljuk, 11th-12th century
H: 4 1/2 in. Diam: 6 1/2 in.
Persia B60 B934

13. Figure of a Bird (Simurgh or Hoopoe)

Glazed earthenware
13th century
H: 7 1/8 in. W: 5 5/8 in.
Persia B60 P2197

14. Bowl with Figures near a Tree and Water

Earthenware decorated with overglaze enamels (*mina'i* style)
12th-13th century
H: 4 in. D: 8 in.
Persia B60 P1874

15. Bowl with Arabesque and Endless Knot Design

Earthenware decorated with overglaze enamels (*mina'i* style)
ca. 13th century
H: 3 1/4 in. Diam: 8 in.
Persia B60 P1863

16. Star Shaped Tile with Border Inscription from the Koran

Earthenware decorated with luster
From Kashan or Sultanabad, dated in accordance with 1265
Persia B60 P2034

17. Small Inscribed Jewel Box or Round Open Container

White jade
Timurid, dated by inscription to the 'Ala al-Daulah ibn Baysunghur reign (1417-60); another inscription, dated in accordance with 1621
H: 1 3/8 in. Diam.: 1 1/4 in.
Eastern Persia B60 J619

18. Court Scene from a *Shah-nama*

Ink and colors on paper
Sultanate period, 15th century
H: 7 1/4 in. W: 4 7/8 in.
India 1989.30
Purchased through the City Arts Trust Fund, the Asian Art Museum Acquisitions Fund, and gift of Stuart Harvey and the Levi Strauss Foundation.

19. Logo (*Tughra*) of Sultan Suleyman the Magnificent (1520-66), Leaf of a Decree

Ink, colors and gold on paper
Ottoman, mid 16th century
H: 10 in. W: 6 3/4 in.
Turkey 1990.12
Gift of the Walter and Phyllis Shorenstein fund

20. Large Dish with Cypress, Tulips and Other Flowers

Earthenware with underglaze blue and polychrome decoration
Iznik, second half of 16th century
H: 2 3/4 in. Diam.: 13 in.
Turkey B60 P1949

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Photography by Kaz Tsuruta except where noted.

THE ISLAMIC ARTS OF ASIA

SLIDE DESCRIPTIONS

1. Muhammad in the Cave

Mughal School, dated 1720

Ink and colors on paper

H:19 3/8" W:10 7/8"

North India B81 D34

Gift of George Hopper Fitch

"There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is His prophet." This clear and simple declaration (the *Shahada*) embodies the spirit and world view of Islam. The youngest of the three great monotheistic religions, Islam is also a civilization, an entire way of life. Its spiritual bases are found in the *Koran* (*Qur'an*), the written record of holy revelation as spoken through and by Muhammad. Muhammad began to have visions and prophesy around 610 when he was about 40 years old.

This painting with handwritten panels of text is a page from a book of religious poetry. In an illustrated page like this, the blocks of text were laid out and inscribed first, leaving space for the illustration. The beauty of the writing was every bit as important aesthetically as the picture since calligraphy was considered a high art, perhaps the highest, in Islamic cultures, where the importance of the word was supreme.

The Prophet is shown with an aura and he is veiled, as was customary in representing this revered, but not worshipped, person. (The Prophet Muhammad was adamant on the subject

of idolatry and never wanted to be seen as a god.) Holding his prayer beads, he sits in deep contemplation on a small carpet in a dark cave. Perhaps the scene represents his early meditations in caves on Mount Hira above Mecca, maybe even the moment when he experienced his earliest revelation as described in one of the Commentaries in the Koran:

Not till forty years of earthly life
had passed
That the veil was lifted from the
Preserved Tablet
And its contents began to be
transferred to the tablet of his mind.
To be proclaimed to the world, and
read and studied
For all time—a fountain of mercy
and wisdom. (C. 28)

This image was painted in northern India in the eighteenth century, at the time when one of the most long-lasting of Islamic dynasties, the Mughal dynasty, was beginning to fade. It looks back to earlier Persian styles that had originally inspired Mughal album painting. The conservative style is in

keeping with the religious subject. The dark cavern appears to be in a mountainous landscape with a city in the distance. A pure, cool stream runs alongside the cave. Beyond, a great desert plain leads back to a range of softly painted distant mountains. The high horizon negates the sense of real space as does the gold leaf used for the desert foreground and the flat, patterned quality of the overlapping mountain shapes with regularly spaced bunches of flowers. Everything is painted with great care and delicacy in the manner of Persian painting, although the surfaces are somewhat looser and less intricately patterned. Also of Persian inspiration are the subtle color harmonies, such as the pinks, gray-blues, and muted greens of the mountains. The arched horizon and the more illusionistic, softly

brushed mountains in the background are characteristic of later Mughal painting.

Muslim incursions into northwest India began in earnest in the eleventh century under the Ghaznavids. By the fourteenth century, Muslim rule was firmly established in northern India. The most lasting and far-reaching Islamic dynasty in India was the Mughal dynasty. It was founded by Babur, a warrior prince from Central Asia, who first invaded Persia and then continued his campaigns into India where he displaced the Sultanate dynasty in 1526. At its peak the Mughal dynasty controlled most of the Indian subcontinent, but never the far south. The dynasty lasted from 1526-1827.

2. Prayer Rug

19th century, silk

L: 71 in. W: 48 in.

Turkey B72 M2

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Willard Caro

Cloth mats or rugs could be used for worship, but fine prayer rugs were especially valued. This example represents a distinctive type of prayer rug in which the prayer niche facing Mecca provides the major motif for the central panel. As in a real mosque, a hanging lamp is suspended from the archway. Metaphorically, light conveyed mystic radiance and divine illumination. The prayer niche can be interpreted as an architectural symbol and an allusion to the gateway to paradise, open to believers through prayer and observation of Islamic beliefs. Because light suggests divine illumination and God's presence, like souls that "drink of the river of Paradise and take shelter in gold lamps that hang in the shadow of God's throne" (Muqarnas, 18), the lamp was an

important symbol, and oil, oil lamps, and candles were often given to shrines by the faithful. Mihrabs also have a funerary connotation; prayer niches are found on shrines, tombs, mausolea, and tombstones as images of death and commemoration (the dead are buried facing Mecca). Various designs can appear under the arch of prayer rugs, such as blossoms, vases of flowers, blooming or fruit-laden trees, all alluding to paradise and the heavenly garden of the faithful. In one so-called cemetery type of prayer rug, cypress and tomb motifs are depicted under the mihrab. There are also prayer rugs with many mihrabs for family worship.

This rug is also interesting because of the serpents around the columns. In the *Koran*, snakes appear to reveal to onlookers the mysterious powers of

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Photography by Kaz Tsuruta except where noted.

God (Sura XX, 14-22; VII, 107-8 and commentary)—as when Moses threw down his rod and it became a live and moving snake. The serpent and dragon were symbols of constellations of the northern hemisphere. They have an old association with water and fertility, and snakes are said to have been used in medicine. They figure in amuletic designs and in use as talismans. In popular lore, snakes could be regarded as spirits.

3. *Masjid-i Shah*, the Royal Mosque

Isfahan, 1612; Safavid dynasty

Brick and glazed tiles

Persia

© Dr. Howard Mitchell

The only element truly shared by all Muslim countries has been the religion of Islam. Even today a traveler can go anywhere in the Islamic world and expect to find certain religious duties enacted by the faithful. Among these is the duty of praying five times daily facing Mecca, the holy city of Islam. The Arabic word for mosque conveys the idea of a "place to prostrate oneself." Muhammad is said to have described a mosque as any place where one prays. To pray Muslims recite prayers and bow down, touching their foreheads to the ground, in an act of subservience to God.

There are two kinds of mosques. The *masjid* is a privately built structure serving a royal patron or a particular segment of the community, such as neighborhood or trade group. A *masjid* can be small or large and impressive like this example, the *Masjid-i Shah* (Mosque of the King) in Isfahan. Large, so-called Friday mosques, where the faithful go to pray communally for the noon prayer on Fridays, the Muslim holy day of the week, have a strong

lateral shape to comfortably enclose a great number of people. An *imam*, or prayer leader, leads the congregation in prayer and prostrations from the *minbar*, a raised pulpit, near the niche, called a *mihrab* (pronounced something like *me-rob*), in the wall facing Mecca.

Mosque architecture and decoration varies throughout the Islamic world in accordance with local materials, climate, environment, and traditions. However, the essential element in any mosque is the wall oriented towards Mecca with the *mihrab* and the *minbar* for sermons. After the tenth century, a dome representing the dome of heaven, was usually built over the *mihrab* identifying the area of prayer and the direction of Mecca from both inside and outside, acting as a visible symbol of the faith. Another prominent feature was the *minaret*, a tower found either singly or in pairs used for the call to worship. Large open courtyards, sometimes with fountains for ablutions (it is necessary to purify oneself with ritual cleansing before prayer) also may appear in mosque construction adjacent

to the domed area of prayer. The most notable Persian contribution to mosque architecture is probably the huge vaulted tunnel-like hall, called *iwan*, with its tall, rectangular front. Opening onto the outside at one end, these arcaded porticoes may mark the entrance to a mosque and occur on four sides of the inner courtyard. In this slide you can see the entrance portal and just make out the four tall, flat fronts of

the *iwan* that surround the inner court.

Mosques have served the Muslim community in a variety of ways since the time of Muhammad. Although essentially places of worship, they have been used for religious education, scholarship and teaching (including housing libraries and living quarters for students), as hostels for traveling religious scholars, and as places to dispense justice and other related roles.

3A. Dome of the Masjid I Shah

© Dr. Howard Mitchell

In this close-up of the dome of the Masjid-i Shah, you can see the gorgeous tile decoration typical of many Persian mosques. The slightly bulbous dome rests on a cylindrical drum which in turn rests on an octagon above the square hall. While the Byzantines met the challenge of mounting a round dome over a square space through the invention of pendentives, curved triangular supports, Islamic architects used an intermediate octagonal course with the transition between the square, octagon, and cylinder accomplished with squinches. Squinches are half-niches arranged in staggered tiers with the upper rows projecting out from the lower. For more complex, ambiguous masses, squinches of small niches multiplied to become *muqarnas*, a "honeycomb" of projecting and receding forms. The projecting points of the niches were sometimes elongated into "stalactites." In this exterior view you cannot see the elaborate construction of the ribbed dome and squinches, but the different courses are clearly visible.

Sculpture was not used for mosque decoration in the way it was on many churches and temples perhaps because Muhammad opposed anything that

might encourage idolatry or because figurative decoration might distract the worshipper from his attention to the spiritual realm of God. Instead, mosque decoration, usually carved or tiled, consists of geometric patterns, symbols, calligraphy (beautiful writing), and arabesques, rhythmic designs of vines and leaves. These patterns are all abstract in nature and can be extended indefinitely in the mind's eye. There is no place to become fixated.

The dome of the Masjid-i Shah shows the colorful, tiled surface covered with circular arabesques in white and yellow on a turquoise ground. The drum below is decorated with two bands of inscriptions in Arabic, the international language of Islam. The upper band is written in the rectilinear Kufic style of calligraphy and the lower one is in the more flowing *naskhi* style. Both the drums and the octagonal transition zone are also decorated with pierced windows.

4. Tile from a Prayer Niche

Molded earthenware decorated with luster and underglaze blue

Kashan style, ca. 1220-1230

H: 12 in. L: 37 in.

Persia B60 P2134C

Because of the importance of ritual prayer and the great reverence held for Mecca, prayer niches often were beautifully embellished with colorful tiles bearing verses from the *Koran* or religious sayings. This thirteenth century example may have been made in a Persian city south of Tehran by a family of specialized craftsmen or by a workshop of master-potter decorators. The molded cobalt blue letters in relief are part of a sentence, probably a

Koranic verse mentioning praise. Arabic reads from right to left.

The lustrous brownish copper background, with accents of turquoise glaze, is filled with movement and life. Like a paradise garden, birds perch on leafy stems amidst dense dotted and curling space-filling designs. The scrolling stems of foliage sweep up and down in a repeated linear movement called an arabesque, typical of Islamic art (see also slides 4, 8, 10, and 15).

5. Bowl

Earthenware decorated with luster

9th-10th century

H: 3 in. Diam: 10 1/2 in.

Persia or Iraq B60 P478

As Islam spread, conquered states endorsed the new religion and became integral parts of a dynamic new empire centered first in Damascus and later in the capital of Baghdad. Luxury products were abundant, from textiles and metal goods to glassware, perfumes, and incense.

Ceramics glittered like gold or gilt metal with a technique called luster (seen here and in the previous slide). Metallic pigments of silver and copper oxide mixed with sulfur were painted on an opaque white-glazed surface then fixed in a second firing at a lower temperature and with a reduced amount of air. This produced a metallic sheen ranging in color from yellow-gold to brass, brown, ruby, and copper. The luster technique became extremely popular in western Asia and represents one of the finest achievements of

Islamic potters. Craftsmen in many places, such as Egypt, Iraq, Persia, and later Spain produced outstanding examples.

This bowl may be from Iraq or Persia. Geometric stars made of rectangles and polygons painted with dotted circles (peacock's eyes) are combined with traditional Near Eastern split palmettes (conventionalized petals and floral parts) and rosettelike flowers. The design is not simply abstract or geometric, but contains life-giving plant elements. Just as with a carpet or textile, patterns cover the object. Typical of Islamic art, designs seem to have a capacity for infinite growth, inexhaustible repetition and progression as they spread over surfaces and provide a framework for enjoyment and deeper contemplation, enhanced here by the subtle opulence of light reflecting

over shades of gold.

The Islamic world excelled in applied geometry. Major design motifs were generated from geometric elements. Polygons and rectangles rotated on their sides could become stars, as in this example. By superimposing shapes on grids, using circles, parts of circles, extending tangents and radii, and bisecting and intersecting forms, craftsmen achieved incredible variation, harmony, and complexity within a geometric format, suggesting the unity and underlying order within God's universe.

6. Bowl with Kufic Script

Earthenware decorated with slips

9th-10th century

H: 4 1/4 in. Diam.: 15 3/4 in.

Samarkand area, Transoxiana (Central Asia) B60 P1862

Since Arabic is the sacred language of the holy *Koran* and was the official language in the first centuries of Arab rule in Islamic Persia and elsewhere, artists used Arabic inscriptions on everything from monumental buildings to portable objects. Like Latin, Arabic united people of different linguistic and ethnic backgrounds, and Islamic calligraphy developed into a great art form with many styles.

Some of the earliest and most striking examples of surviving Arabic calligraphy are to be found on large inscribed bowls of the ninth and tenth centuries from Eastern Persia and Central Asia. As seen here, the writing is extraordinarily powerful in its abstract rhythms. With stark simplicity and bold strength, black letters are painted against a white field in an angular script known as Kufic. It is impossible to imagine the visual excitement of this simple utilitarian bowl shape without the effective placement and drama of the writing. The bowl itself is of reddish clay,

covered with a white slip and painted with contrasting liquid clays under a transparent glaze.

Divided into four sections on the interior, the inscription reads: "Take the middle road in [your] affairs: indeed, it is a Salvation. Don't ride a too gentle mount or a too obstinate one" (trans. Charles Branch). Typically, the messages on these wares tend to be blessings, good wishes to the owner, popular sayings and proverbs rather than religious phrases from the *Koran*. Because of this and the noteworthy quality of the calligraphy which reflects the high level of culture in these areas, it is assumed they were enjoyed by urban notables and members of the wealthy elite. The exceptional refinement of the pottery and epigraphy here suggests it was made in the oasis region of Samarkand which became very wealthy from its fine agricultural and grazing lands and its prominent position on the Silk Road.

It was supposedly near here that Chinese prisoners were captured in 751

at the battle of Talas when the Chinese were driven back eastward by the advancing Islamic armies. These prisoners, it is said, passed on the secret of making paper to the Islamic world, thereby revolutionizing the making of *Korans* and other manuscripts.

7. Bowl with Horse and Rider

Glazed earthenware with underglaze slip decoration
Nishapur, 9th-10th century
H: 3 1/4 in. Diam.: 7 1/4 in.
Eastern Persia B60 P1886

This bowl is from Nishapur, a once-prosperous cosmopolitan city situated on a fertile plain in Eastern Persia on one of the trade routes between Europe and China (the Silk Road). Chinese ceramics have been excavated there, as they have from other places such as Siraf on the Persian Gulf. Nishapur's bustling bazaars were famous for their ceramics and also for the quality of their textiles which were exported to other parts of the Middle East and Europe.

Just as we have observed plants and birds in earlier slides (slides 4 and 5), we now see the use of the human figure in art: a bearded rider with raised sword holds the reins of a horse. The *Koran* did not prohibit representations of living creatures, and in areas where pre-Islamic traditions were strong, these images often were incorporated into the visual arts. Realism, however, was discouraged in representation. The human figure is painted in a very abstract way and with great artistic license. Notice how the man's body is totally hidden by his dotted garment and leggings. The drawn-out eye shown in his profile is so stylized it resembles the horse's. The background does not depict the real world either: a yellow backdrop dabbed with green is randomly sprinkled with flowerettes, dotted circles, a peacocklike bird, and scattered Kufic letters that are probably stylized blessings.

The theme of horse and rider recalls pre-Islamic scenes of rulers on horseback being invested by divine authority, exuding the mystique of kingship, defeating enemies, and enjoying the cycle of royal pastimes such as hunting. The legendary Persian hero Rustam often was pictured on horseback, performing heroic exploits, and mounted riders and their attendants were prominent on wall paintings of the area.

The lively style of painting on this bowl suggests the creative energy of the cities and courts of eastern Persia, where independent rulers broke away from Arab dominance. A renaissance of Persian culture occurred in this region. Using Arabic letters, scholars and poets wrote in a Persian language enriched with Arabic words and drew inspiration from the Persian past. Firdawsi (d. 1020) gave final form to his life's work, the *Shah-nama*, the greatest epic masterpiece of Persian literature. Its rhymed verses deal with the legendary heroes and dynastic rulers of Persia, including Rustam who braved many dangers on his horse and who forms the subject of many illustrations. Woven through is the recurring theme of struggle between the Persian and non-Persian worlds (slides 9 and 10, Arts of Persia packet).

8. Architectural (Dado) Panel with Persian Inscription

Marble with pigments

From the palace of Sultan Mas'ud III (r. 1099-1115), Ghazni, 1112-1113

H: 29 1/4 in. W: 17 in.

Afghanistan B87 S3

Gift of Shawn and Brook Byers, and Peter Marks in honor of Avery Brundage's Centenary Year

This marble panel come from a twelfth century royal palace in Ghazni, the Ghaznavid capital near Kabul. Hundreds of these reliefs, probably all once brilliantly painted in blue and red, decorated the lower courtyard arcade of one of the last Ghaznavid rulers. This example is robustly carved in relief with overlapping arches and scrolling foliage. Buildings could be faced with tiles (as in slides 3, 4, and 16), stucco, bricks, stone, and other materials. This palace shows an early Islamic use of marble as decorative veneer. At the top of the panel is a portion of a Kufic inscription, probably words from verses by a court poet praising the achievements of the sultan and his forebears. The panel would have been one of many forming part of a longer monumental inscription about the ruler. What is noteworthy is that these words are in Persian—one of the earliest examples in architecture of the use of the Persian language. This is fitting since the Turkish Ghaznavids sponsored the use of Persian as a literary language. Characteristically, Arabic coexists at the site for there is an Arabic text in the palace giving the date of the structure—equivalent to 1112-1113 (Islamic reckoning of time is by a lunar calendar. The year one began in 622 when Muhammad emigrated from Mecca to Medina. On May 21 of our year 1995, the new Islamic year will be 1416).

The Eastern Persian world extending into Central Asia played a vital role in Islamic civilization. It was here that many Turkish peoples became Islamicized and were brought under the sway of Persian culture. This area also provided a kind of buffer, protecting

central Islamic lands from incursions of Steppe groups. Among the most famous patrons of art and literature in Persian history were the Turkish Ghaznavids (pronounced something like *GOZZ-na-vids*), descendants of a mercenary. The Ghaznavids became converts to Sunni Islam and also lavish supporters of Persian culture in areas they conquered from the tenth century on. Under them what is present-day Afghanistan became a major center of patronage. Converted to Islam and Persianized, the Turkish Ghaznavids helped spread Islam as a world religion.

By 1030 the Turkish Sultan Mahmud (pronounced *mah-MOOD*), "the Scourge of the Infidel" (d. 1030), had won most of the Persian plateau for himself and helped bring Islam to India as he laid claim to the upper Ganges Valley, Central Asia, and northern Persia. To his court flocked scholars, scientists, and historians. Among these was al-Biruni (d. Ca. 1050) who went on raids to India, learned Sanskrit, and wrote the first serious Islamic study on the Hindus. It was said Mahmud's poets alone numbered 400. The most renowned poet whose name is linked with Mahmud was Firdawsi, whose *Shah-nama* was mentioned in the previous slide.

An interesting little side note is that the Ghaznavids used war elephants (received as tribute from India) on their campaigns; however, this limited their mobility against more mobile Steppe nomads.

9. Madresh

Isfahan, Persia

11th-12th century with later additions

© Dr. Joanna Movassat

This building is a religious school, or *madrasa*, in Isfahan. It shares many features with mosques of this region, notably the dome, paired *minarets*, and the imposing arched entrance or *iwān*. Two tiers of deep niches and groups of squinches, or *muqarnas*, add structural interest to the *iwān*. Colorful tilework decorates the building with a variety of patterns composed of geometric designs, abstract vine-like arabesques, and calligraphy. Muslims used all of these ornamental patterns on their buildings to direct the worshippers' attention to God and the world of the spirit. These patterns, which are not fixed in time and space but can go on indefinitely, lead the soul to contemplate the endless, universal nature of God.

The spirit of God was also to be found in the garden. This all-important part of Islamic architecture represents paradise and always features water in clear sparkling pools or running rivulets. The shapely pool here should contain pure, clear water fed into it by a slender spray from the fountain head in the center. Water from the architectural pools and fountains was often used by the faithful for the purifying ablutions necessary before prayer, and also provided beauty and inspiration. In the desert landscapes of Persia, a group of poplars indicated an oasis with its life-giving waters and cool shade, thus they are frequently used in Persian gardens (for more information on Persian gardens, see slides 14 and 20).

A *madrasa* also includes living quarters for students, here located behind the niches of the two-tiered arcade seen on either side of the portico. Like the mosque, the *madrasa* was designed to meet the particular needs of the Islamic community. Whereas the

mosque provided a place for the community of believers to gather to pray and hear a sermon at least once a week, the *madrasa* provided a place for prayer and study extended over a longer period of time. It offered intensive study in Koranic commentary, the sayings of Muhammad and his companions, and Islamic law. In their search for knowledge and understanding, students were encouraged to discuss, and even dispute, the teachers and each other over the fine points of the lessons. All Muslims were encouraged to pursue education, and so these schools accepted both male and female students from all classes and regions.

This openness and interest in knowledge led to exploration in many realms of learning (see also slide 12). Muslims became the heirs to the collected wisdom of the Classical world. Their preservation of and additions to the earlier discoveries in chemistry, biology, mathematics, medicine and other fields made the later achievements in these fields possible in Europe when it emerged from its "Dark Ages." Islam played a critically important role in the growth and fostering of knowledge, bridging not only the time gap between Classical and Renaissance learning but also the gap between East and West. Indian wisdom transmitted by Islamic contacts, for instance, include the mathematical principle of zero, and animal fables which came to be known as Aesop's Fables.

10. Incense Burner

Bronze

ca. 12th-13th century

H: 9 1/2 in. Diam.: 5 1/4 in.

Persia or Syria B69 B12

Gift of the Asian Art Foundation of San Francisco

This bronze incense burner shows the refinement of furnishings created in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The metal is pierced with openwork patterns of vine scrolls through which incense would have billowed outward and up. The lid on which the bird perches is hinged, and so could easily be opened to light the incense. There once would have been a handle on the side to pick up and move the object.

The burning of incense was adopted by Islam for its mosques, but was not an Islamic invention. Its use throughout the Near East dates back hundreds of years before Muhammad. In Islamic times, notables are reported

to have perfumed themselves at an incense burner before meeting a caliph. The fragrance was part of the ceremonial atmosphere of audience halls, where religious leaders, kings, and dignitaries presided. Incense also found its way into the drawing rooms of the city aristocracy and was important in Islamic trade. Aromatic woods, oils, and herbs were brought from India, Africa, and elsewhere to the Middle East and also transshipped to Europe. Frankincense and myrrh came from shrubs native to the Arabian desert.

11. Blue and White Bowl

Earthenware decorated with underglaze blue, incised and pierced designs

Seljuk, 12th-13th century AD

H: 3 in. Diam.: 6 1/2 in.

Persia B60 P1974

Though this bowl was made in Persia, it resembles the blue-and-white porcelains of China. The rim is painted blue under a transparent glaze, and the fired clay appears whitish because of the composite white body, developed at this time, which was made of ground quartz frit, white clay and potash. The concept for the new body may have come from imported Chinese porcelains or been an idea applied from Near Eastern bead or glass making. Besides the whitish material, the thinness and shape of this straight-sided, footed bowl suggest Chinese inspiration. However, the

pierced glazed windows of twisting bands (*guioche*) add a purely Islamic note of patterning to the piece. In the interior also, the glaze pools in a faintly greenish-blue color, rather than being perfectly clear. Ceramic latticework or pierced windows of light (slide 3) find their counterpart in Islamic metal objects which were pierced and perforated (slide 10; see also slide 14, Arts of Persia packet).

For centuries Chinese blue-and-white ceramics continued to be admired and collected by Islamic rulers in India and the Middle East. For instance, a

THE ISLAMIC ARTS OF ASIA

number of porcelains are found in Tehran and in collections of Ottoman rulers in Istanbul, the result of booty and importation. A Ming blue-and-white bowl in the Asian Art Museum (B65 P6) was once a prized possession of a Mughal emperor in India—something we know because the footrim is carved with an inscription giving a date equivalent to 1644 and the words "Shah Jahan, son of Shah Jahangir." A seventeenth century British traveler recorded the furor that a broken Chinese dish caused at the Mughal court: a ceramic belonging to Jahangir fell from a camel. Two years later, the emperor discovered that his favorite object was broken and had the chief attendant in charge of his belongings severely punished. The man was then sent to China to find a substitute but was unable to do so. At last the ruler of Persia gave Jahangir a Chinese dish out of sympathy (*Transactions of the Oriental Ceramic Society*, vol. 36, 33).

Contact between the Islamic world and the Far East went both ways. Probably from the ninth century on, Chinese potters used native as well as Near Eastern sources of blue pigment, called cobalt, for painted designs on ceramics. The imported cobalt, which came to China by sea via Sumatra or overland on the trade route, was sometimes called Muhammadan or Islamic blue. Some Islamic shapes appear in China as do Persian and Arabic inscriptions, probably by special order for Chinese Muslims or for export.

Muslim communities were transplanted eastward by the impetus of trade and the needs of spreading the faith. Moving from the Middle East along stepping stones provided by Indian ports, Islam followed the maritime route of merchants. The first major foothold was in northern Sumatra, which was on the main route between western Asia, the Spice Islands (the Moluccas), and the Far East. In some areas (i.e., Java), Chinese Mus-

lims facilitated this spread. Today, the country of Indonesia has the world's largest Muslim population. Islam entered China by sea from southeast Asia and also via the overland Silk Routes. Turkish peoples were overwhelmingly Islamic until Mongolia became Lamaist Buddhist in the sixteenth century. Today in northwestern and western China, ethnic minorities (the Uighurs, Kazakhs, Tadjiks, etc.) account for large blocks of Muslim minorities in China. Within China proper, the Hui minority are Muslim.

12. Mortar with Ring Handles

Bronze

Seljuk, 11th-12th century

H: 4 1/2 in. Diam: 6 1/2 in.

Persia B60 B934

The greatness of medieval Islamic culture can be seen in fields other than the arts. Muslim scholars laid the foundation for research in areas such as chemistry, biology, physics, astronomy, medicine, botany, history, and geography.

This is an octagonal bronze mortar used by a physician or pharmacist in Persia to grind ingredients for use in medication. With sturdy ring handles, this solid shape was suitable for pounding the herbs and minerals to make medicines. The engraved and molded decoration features outlined, almond-shaped bosses, a band of calligraphy and plant arabesques favored by Islam.

Muslim doctors led the world in medicine when medical science in Europe was largely based on myth and superstition. The Islamic world had schools of medicine where doctors were given theoretical teaching followed by clinical practice in a hospital. There were manuscripts on diseases, including symptoms and diagnoses. The Muslim world was able to draw on pre-Islamic and non-Islamic expertise and move forward in the science of medicine.

Muslims also excelled in many scientific fields while their European counterparts were hampered by theological restrictions of the Church. Official medieval Christian doctrine maintained certain scientific beliefs now considered false, e.g., the earth being the center of the universe. At the time, great European astronomers such as Galileo and Copernicus found they could not publish all their research without drawing accusations of heresy. Early Islamic astronomers, on the other hand, were actually encouraged by the religious community to study the

heavens because of a need for determining the direction to the Great Mosque in Mecca toward which all Muslims must face during ritual prayers, and for determining the exact time of day so the pious would know when to pray (ritual prayer being performed five times daily at specified times). Beyond these and other religious needs, Islam officially sanctioned all scientific research, though knowledge of spiritual matters was considered most important.

13. Figure of a Bird (Simurgh or Hoopoe)

Glazed earthenware

13th century

H: 7 1/8 in. W: 5 5/8 in.

Persia B60 P2197

Standing on a flat base, this crested bird is not only highly appealing as a figurine, but also invokes notions of good fortune and myth. The deep manganese blue glaze is typical of the rich gemlike glaze colors of this period.

Sculpture did not entirely die out in the Near Eastern countries that were conquered by the Muslims, but generally figural sculpture did not provide the creative focus for Muslim artists that more abstract art forms did. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries a significant amount of three-dimensional figurines were made in Persia and elsewhere in the Middle East. Sculptural elements appear on clearly functional pieces, such as the bird on the lid of the incense burner in slide 10, and entire objects take the shape of animals, fabulous creatures, and even figures in architectural settings. Often these figurines have no clear practical function. Some may have been appreciated as art works in their own right. A number could have served as toys, flower vases, or holders for water, wine or perfume. Conceivably some were made as special gifts or for use in ceremonies, or as cult objects connected with folk beliefs. Highly decorative examples such as this may have conveyed auspicious meanings to their owners. They may have been enjoyed on many levels—as beautiful display items, symbols of good omen, and as visual pretexts for deeper philosophical thoughts or cosmological associations.

This bird suggests some of the remarkable feathered creatures of legend. A messenger and guide, the hoopoe was mentioned in a story about Solomon in the *Koran* (Sura, XXVII, 20-28) and other writings. The hoopoe also is described in a tale about the

simurgh, a mythic bird who saved Persian heroes in the *Shah-nama* and who came to resemble the phoenix in later Chinese-influenced depictions. The simurgh signified the illuminating brilliance of reflections of the divine. In one tale, thirty birds in search of the simurgh (the supreme being) discover while journeying that they are identical with what they seek. Comparably, in mystic thought the seer and the seen, the lover and the beloved are the same. The bird thus becomes a metaphor for the soul's mystical, transforming understanding of God (Burgel; Vitray-Meyerovitch).

By the time this ceramic sculpture was made the Seljuk empire had fallen apart into separate territories, weakened by dynastic in-fighting, the rise of other dynasties, and new incursions from Central Asia. The Seljuks also had helped touch off the Crusades by taking Jerusalem and Damascus and defeating the Byzantine army. While Sunni dogma was dominant and while battles with the Crusaders hardened Islamic attitudes towards the non-Islamic world, more mystical (Sufi) trends also became apparent. Individual piety and spirituality were fostered by mystic orders. Persian lyrical poetry often incorporated some of this mysticism. Despite less than perfect socio-political conditions, craftsmen continued to produce highly creative objects for consumption.

NOTE:

The Crusades were :

1st: 1095-99

2nd: 1147-49

3rd: 1189-92

4th: 1202-4

Children's: 1212

5th: 1217-21

6th: 1228-29

7th: 1248-54

8th: 1270

9th: 1271-72 (Muslims took Tripoli and Acre).

The Crusades marked the first time large numbers of Europeans of the Middle Ages traveled and saw Islamic civilization firsthand in the Middle East. They brought back Islamic objects, such as a metalwork basin now used as a baptismal font in a Christian church in France.

14. Bowl with Figures near a Tree and Water

Earthenware decorated with overglaze enamels (*mina'i* style)

12th-13th century

H: 4 in. D: 8 in.

Persia B60 P1874

Wall paintings and miniature paintings no longer extant can be recalled through scenes such as this. Two figures in a landscape kneel beside water under a tree with numerous flying, hovering, and perching birds. An attendant stands to the left, and a container, possibly of sweetmeats, rests near them. The moon-shaped faces are highly stylized, as are the figures which are covered by decorative garments. The physical environment is reduced to isolated details and the shorthand of flowing water. An inscription on the exterior mentions "eternal strength and abundant prosperity and triumphant victory and strength."

The bowl is painted in overglaze enamel (*mina'i* means "enameled"). Such elegant, fragile wares were made for the wealthy and not intended for hard, everyday use because of the fine, easily effaced painting. The polychrome colors were painted on a thin, turquoise glaze and fixed in a second firing at a lower temperature so as not to injure the quality of the enamels.

Besides being a sketchy description of figures near a tree and water, this landscape may also be looked at on another level—as a mystical rapturous vision of paradise. Gardens were emblematic of paradise. As one Islamic mystic put it, gardens provided a veil by which a person could experience God and God's grace. From ancient times in the Near East, the tree of life was a potent symbol, and gardens had cosmological meaning. The Arabs idealized an oasis, and Persians saw in a garden an orderly, lush, walled or gated paradise of fragrant scent, sound and refreshing coolness, with flowers, birds, fruiting or blossoming trees, and water. Quartered, with a fountain in the middle, or with clear axes, gardens

needed pools, fountains or channels of flowing, coursing or reflecting water which provided spiritual refreshment as well as inviting contrast with the dry harshness of the land outside. The *Koran* describes the righteous dwelling in gardens of everlasting bliss (*Sura IX*, 72), with rivers flowing beneath, and with springs, trees, fruits, dates, pomegranate's, carpets, meadows, and other delights. These paradisiacal gardens often are suggested in religious buildings (as in slide 4), and wall paintings representing paradise landscapes also are mentioned in connection with thirteenth century palaces. Firdawsi was buried in his own orchard, and tombs, shrines, and mausolea typically are in gardenlike settings or convey garden imagery in some way. The Islamic-Persian notion of a garden had great influence on areas as far apart as Mughal India (the Taj Mahal), Muslim Spain (the Alhambra), and Spanish gardens in the New World.

15. Bowl with Arabesque and Endless Knot Design

Earthenware decorated with overglaze enamels (*mina'i* style)
ca. 13th century
H: 3 1/4 in Diam: 8 in.
Persia B60 P1863

Fragile, elaborately painted enameled ceramics also exemplify luxury goods and the elegant tastes of wealthy households. This bowl is decorated with overglaze enamels of red, grayish turquoise, gray, and black over an opaque white glaze. It is typical of many made in Persia in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, possibly for the court and the elite. Some vessels were painted with floral patterns and others with scenes of figures that relate to contemporary manuscript illustration and wall painting. Here split palmettes interlink in arabesques over the interior. Interspersed with mystic knots (a symbol for infinity and the mystic notion of unity), the lush growths appear to emanate from a central six-sided star. The patterns are imbued with dynamic energy as they surge exuberantly outward and around in a circular movement. The mystic knots appear like a gray shadow beneath the arabesques.

Mystical, magical, and good luck signs, as well as abstract and numerical symbols, appear in many media. The use and form of the knot motif ultimately derives from non-Islamic Zoroastrian ideas and practices where knots symbolized various threads of religious belief. It was adopted by Islamic mystics (Sufis) and Christians. The mystic knot is also one of the eight precious things in Buddhism. It is found in Tibetan and Mongol religious art and even on Mongol coins. The great Islamic mystic poet Rumi (d. 1273), writing in Persian, utilized the knot image: "Even though you tie a hundred knots, the string remains one" (Muqarnas, 234).

16. Star-shaped Tile with Border Inscription from the Koran

Earthenware decorated with luster
From Kashan or Sultanabad, dated in accordance with 1265
Persia B60 P2034

The twelfth to fourteenth centuries marked a time of great building activity, first under the Turkish Seljuks and then their Mongol and Turkic-Mongol successors in western and Central Asia. Palatial residences, mosques, schools, hospitals, tomb towers, mausolea and shrines were built. Reconstructions also occurred after the thirteenth century Mongol invasions.

This tile was made several decades after the Mongol invasions under Chinggis Khan (d. 1227). It continues the luster tradition (slide 5) with dense patterning lightened by white areas in reserve. The eight-pointed star would have been one of many similarly-shaped star tiles on a wall. The tiles would have fit together in a matrix with other cross-shaped and star-shaped tiles.

The outer border has a cursive inscription from the *Koran* (Sura XCVII, 1-5) and a date corresponding to Ramadan, 1265. The verses concern the mystic revelation of God which illuminates the human soul, bringing enlightenment and spiritual peace and dispelling darkness and ignorance on the Night of Power. "And what will explain to thee what the Night of Power is? / The Night of Power is better than a thousand Months. / Therein come down the angels and the Spirit by God's permission, on every Peace! . . . This until the rise of morn!" Ramadan, the holy month commemorating the first Revelation of the *Koran*, is the ninth month of the Muslim lunar year and is celebrated by month-long fasting from dawn until sundown.

The Mongols controlled the largest land-based empire ever known, extending from northern China to the Black Sea. These semi-nomadic warriors and herdsman practiced shamanism, Buddhism, and Christianity (Buddhist temples are known to have existed in towns with mosques). However, by the late thirteenth century they began converting to Islam, thereby bridging the religious gap between themselves and their subjects. Their successors in the area from Persia to Asia Minor were the Il-Khans ("Viceroys"). In the fourteenth century Timur (Turkish meaning "iron") and his Turkic-Mongol armies advanced across Persia and Syria to dominate the territory from Anatolia to northern India and present-day Afghanistan. Just before he died in 1405 Timur, was preparing to wage war against Ming China. Like his father, Timur was Muslim and was intrigued by Islamic mysticism. He sponsored the construction of mosques and schools, including domed shrines with dazzling colored patterns of glazed tiles and a mosque in Samarkand of imposing proportions.

Chinggis Khan and Timur are significant for Islamic history in many ways. These alien military conquerors

with pan-Asiatic visions brought the Middle East into direct contact with the Far East and the West. The thirteenth-fifteenth centuries, was a pivotal period when military rulers campaigned for power and distant international contacts were forged. This was the time of Marco Polo (d. 1324) and the Tangier-born Ibn Battutah (d. 1377) whose travels criss-crossed the Middle East and took him from Africa to India, Sumatra, and China. The Il-Khans and Timurids received envoys from Europe. From the Far East came Chinese styles and images: phoenixes, lotuses, dragons, and cloud scrolls gained popularity in art. The Il-Khans also introduced Chinese style paper money at one point. Timur, as part of his ambitious desire for imperial grandeur, forcibly relocated artists from conquered lands. The result was a polyglot, but unified style created by artists and craftsmen from Persia, Syria, Anatolia, India, and Central Asia. This cosmopolitanism at the service of a princely leader can be seen in historical writing, which had always been a category of Islamic literature. The Mongol Il-Khans were responsible for the first major attempt to describe the history of Christian Europe as well as trace Mongol history. Timur likewise readied himself for posterity by sponsoring his own biography and dynastic chronicles.

17. Small Inscribed Jewel Box or Round Open Container

White jade

Timurid, dated by inscription to the 'Ala al-Daulah ibn Baysunghur reign (1417-60); another inscription dated in accordance with 1621

H: 1 3/8 in. Diam.: 1 1/4 in.

Eastern Persia B60 J619

To help legitimize his reign, Timur linked himself to the lineage of Chinggis Khan (mentioned in slide 16) and glorified his reign with luxurious artwork. A royal workshop created everything from manuscripts and illustrated histories to designs for tents and tiles. He and princely families relished sumptuous, luxurious objects. This tiny, rare white jade is carved with two separate inscriptions from two different Islamic dynasties, the Timurid and the Mughal. The Timurids in India were known as Mughals, the Persian word for Mongol. The larger of the two inscriptions here says that it was made for the grandson of Timur: "The Sultan, son of the Sultan, may his reign last forever, (God) willing upon completion of this jewel box" (trans. Charles Branch). The other band of exquisitely fine writing in Persian around the rim bears a date equivalent to 1621 when the jade came to be owned by one of Timur's successors in India, the Mughal Emperor Jahangir (r. 1605-27). It reads: "So long as the casket of the heavens revolves, let the world be Jahangir Shah's" (trans. Dr. Terry Allen). Jahangir and other Mughal rulers were very conscious of genealogy and history, and knowingly collected Timurid pieces and memorabilia to which they often had their own names inscribed.

The Timurids were the first Islamic dynasty to really exploit the use of jade. Chinese jades were brought in through trade and diplomatic exchanges, and jade was available in areas the Timurids controlled. Jade was believed to have a protective, talismanic quality, being able to detect poisons and ensure victory. Its sheer

luxury value was appreciated, and Chinese influence—noteworthy in other media at that time as well—is noticeable in design, with significant adjustments. Jade was adapted to fit such Timurid needs as drinking cups, seals, sword hilts, and even a tomb cover. The present example possibly was based on an Islamic metal shape in gold or silver.

18. Court Scene from a *Shah-nama*

Ink and colors on paper

Sultanate period, 15th century

H: 7 1/4 in. W: 4 7/8 in.

India 1989.30

Purchased through the City Arts Trust Fund, the Asian Art Museum Acquisitions Fund, and gift of Stuart Harvey and the Levi Strauss Foundation.

Wave after wave of conquering Muslims brought Persian art styles into India, but artists in India transformed these styles into something quite different. In contrast to the more lyrical, ornamental Persian style, Indian taste often ran to bolder, simpler, and more expressive imagery. Furthermore, before the introduction of the Persian vertical book format, Indian books assumed a horizontal format derived from the original palm-leaf manuscripts. Sultanate paintings, from the pre-Mughal period, often display a combination of Persian and Indian styles.

This page from a sixteenth-century Sultanate *Shah-nama* (*The Book of Kings*) combines the full vertical page of the Persian style book with the Indian horizontal format preserved in the illustration. Indian also is the use of hot colors, the flat background, and the division of the composition into separate space cells. The primary figures are brought up close with smaller subsidiary figures placed behind and to the side in a heiratic arrangement. Although the picture is more Indian in the general composition and use of color, the Persian details and subject matter make clear that this painting was commissioned by an Islamic patron.

Two figures sit facing towards each other in separate, bordered picture cells. The figure on the right is the enthroned Great Persian King Khosroes. Before him sits the mighty hero, Rustam. Favorite episodes from Firdawsi's epic poem, relating the sweep of Persian history from its creation to its conquest by the Arabs in the seventh century, tell

of the heroic adventures of the mythical Rustam, who vanquished the forces of evil, whether they be warriors of the enemy camp or supernatural demons. Here, although seated lower, Rustam, this larger-than-life hero, rises above his king. Both men wear short-sleeved, mid-length tunics over trousers and long sleeved shirts. As members of a warrior aristocracy, they wear boots and daggers thrust in their belts. Behind the king are Indian emblems of rank, a pair of parasols above the throne and an attendant with a fly-whisk, while with Rustam we see articles of Persian courtly life, elegant attenuated flasks and imported musical instruments.

Ibn Battuta, an inveterate traveler from Tangier, recorded audiences with the Sultan of Delhi in the mid fourteenth century. In his journal he wrote: "As a rule his audiences are held after the afternoon prayer, although he often holds them early in the day. He sits on a raised seat standing on a dais carpeted in white, with a large cushion behind him and two others as arm-rests on his right and left. . . . As the Sultan sits down the chamberlains and naquibs say in their loudest voice *Bismillah*. The 'great king' Qabula takes his place behind the Sultan, standing with a fly-whisk in his hand to drive off the flies" (Gibb, 660-61). Here the artist has indicated many of those details that appear to have continued into the late fifteenth century. Notice also behind Rustam that there appears to be a basket of green leaves and spherical objects. Perhaps this description of the ceremonies held when the Sultan returned from a journey, can help identify those: "and

everyone who drinks receives [at the same time] betel leaves and areca nuts" (Gibbs, 668).

India was Islamicized over several centuries. The Ghaznavid Turks were the first to reach North India, penetrating as far as the Upper Ganges Valley. These Islamic invaders arrived mostly seeking dominion and wealth. Later incursions into India were made by the Afghans driving Muslim penetration east and west and gradually south. Rival Sultanates became established at times when the ruling Delhi Sultanate was weak. Especially in the outlying regions there was a peaceful comingling of Muslim and Hindu populations, which gave rise to a richly eclectic culture. In the south the Deccani

Sultanates became the most long lasting independent Muslim powers controlling the region between the Narbada and the Krishna Rivers. It was the Mughals, however, who left the strongest impression. Their early policies of integrating conquered princes into the government and allowing freedom of religion created a strong national state and culture, at least for the first half of their period of dominion. Ruling from 1526-1857, they patronized many art forms from highly individualistic miniatures to great monuments of architecture, such as the Red Fort and the Taj Mahal.

19. Logo (*Tughra*) of Sultan Suleyman the Magnificent (1520-66),

Leaf of a Decree

Ink, colors and gold on paper

Ottoman, mid 16th century

H: 10 in. W: 6 3/4 in.

Turkey 1990.12

Gift of the Walter and Phyllis Shorenstein fund

Between 1500 and 1800 western Asia felt the power of three major Islamic empires: the Mughal (mentioned in slides 17 and 18); the Safavid empire of Persia (which was Shi'ite); and the Sunni Ottoman Turkish empire, with its capital in Istanbul (Constantinople before being conquered in 1453). The origins of the Ottomans were in thirteenth century Anatolia, but by the sixteenth century (the time of this image) the Ottoman empire was multi-ethnic and international, extending from Egypt over to Algeria and part of Morocco, up through Iraq and western Persia and into Greece and the Balkans. Under Sultan Suleyman I in the sixteenth century, the Ottomans captured Rhodes and laid siege to Hapsburg Vienna. Their naval fleets were famous in the Mediterranean and

Indian Ocean. This ruler was not only a major political figure but a lavish patron of art and architecture.

Suleyman's far-flung empire needed a large bureaucracy of palace officials, governors, army, and administrative personnel. This sheet of paper bears the logo of Suleyman and reveals the aesthetic quality of even legal documents. In Turkish tradition, Suleyman's name is made into a stylized monogram (*tughra*) with sharp outlines, loops, and curving flourishes accented with cobalt blue, red, and gold. Cloud scrolls illuminate the name. State documents were authenticated by this type of logo. The chancellery at court would put the sultan's formal signature or logo on the document and a clerk would later double check and certify the contents.

This is the opening part of an imperial edict dealing with the settlement of a religious dispute involving a property deed and conditions of upkeep and maintenance. Six black lines in Arabic on the left side run perpendicular to the page and mention the dispute and the name and seal of the corroborating chief army judge in Greece and the Balkans (who also supervised other judges). Beneath it is probably a clerk's countersignature.

20. Large Dish with Cypress, Tulips and Other Flowers

Earthenware with underglaze blue and polychrome decoration

Iznik, second half of 16th century

H: 2 3/4 in. Diam.: 13 in.

Turkey B60 P1949

Chinese ceramics were esteemed by the Ottoman court for ceremonial use and were collected and stored in the Topkapi Sarayi treasury. The opulence of the court is suggested by the fact that the finest types of ware such as this were commonly used for everyday court life. Objects often would be made to order for the court, in accordance with designs provided by the royal court workshop (itself an international fusion of craftsmen). Both tiles and vessels were produced at Iznik (Byzantine Nicaea), a town in Anatolia. Iznik ceramics also were owned by wealthy landowners or merchants and could at one point be bought on the open market. Europeans admired these wares, and foreign diplomats and travelers treasured examples brought back to Europe, often setting them in metal mounts. Iznik ceramics inspired some sixteenth century Italian potters.

While Chinese blue-and-white might have provided early models, the vibrant polychrome grouping of plants and the sinuous rhythms seen here are typically Turkish. Like a garden lightly

blown by a breeze, the feathery cypress and twisting and bending flowers give the effect of a profusion of energized plant life. The colors are unrealistic, but add to the vividness of the composition. The blue cypress has a tomato-red trunk and turquoise leaves. Emulating Chinese porcelain, the body of the dish is a hard white frit covered with a white slip.

As European influence penetrated western Asia, Islamic societies responded to the impact of the West in a process which continues to this day. In its turn Islamic civilization has inspired the West with its art and other achievements from medicine to literature. The tulips around this plate are a reminder of one of the many contributions of the Islamic world to the west: tulips were the first introduced into Europe from Turkey where they started a craze known as tulipmania and provided a lasting botanical gift.

THE ISLAMIC ARTS OF ASIA

SLIDE SCRIPT

This slide packet is about the Islamic culture that was established in the Near East and spread to many other countries in Asia as well as Africa and Europe. Islam, a religion based on the revelations and teachings of Muhammad, spread quickly north out of the Arabian Peninsula into Mesopotamia, Persia, and Egypt in the seventh century. Later it spread even further across North Africa and into Spain, east across Central Asia and into China, and later south to India and eastward to Indonesia. You will be looking at slides that show some of the art created by Islamic countries in Asia from the ninth to the eighteenth centuries.

1. Muhammad in a Cave.

This slide shows a page from an Indian book of Islamic religious poetry. It depicts Muhammad seated on a small prayer rug in a cave, perhaps on Mt. Hira. He had gone up into the mountains to meditate and pray and it was there that he received his revelations from God that he taught to others and wrote down in a book called the Koran.

The picture was painted in India in 1720, during the later part of the Mughal dynasty. It combines the delicate and precise style of Persian painting with a looser, more illusionistic landscape in Mughal style. The artist was probably given and told to use the gold to make this religious painting all the more precious.

Muslims, people who follow Islam, do not worship Muhammad but revere him as a great prophet. Out of respect, and also so no one will be tempted to worship his image, his face is never shown. That is why here he is shown with a veil.

2. Prayer Rug

Prayer is a very important part of Islam. Muslims are expected to pray five times a day, prostrating themselves facing the direction of the city of Mecca. Rugs, which were made for use in nomad tents, in houses, or in palaces, were also made especially for prayer. The center part of a prayer rug usually has a bordered rectangle with an arch, or pointed projection at the end. This end is placed so it points to Mecca. When praying, a person stands at the other end, drops to his knees and then bows his head forward, touching the ground to show his submission to God.

3. The Royal Mosque, Isfahan

Muslims pray five times a day at specific times. Often, but not always, they pray in a mosque. For the noon prayer on Fridays, the Muslim holy day, they usually go to a large mosque to pray together and hear a sermon. Here they all face one of the long walls of the mosque, so they can hear and see well in order to pray and bow down in unison. In this wall there is a special, decorated prayer niche, called a *mihrab*, which marks the direction of Mecca. From the outside you usually cannot see the *mihrab*, but a large dome rises over this end of the building showing the direction of Mecca.

Notice the dome of this royal mosque in a city called Isfahan, Persia. You can also see the towers at the other end. The little porches on these *minarets* are used by the *imam*, or spiritual leader, to call people to prayer. Imams had to have very strong voices to call out in all directions reminding the faithful to pray. (Nowadays, with all the noise of modern life, it would be impossible to call loud enough, so loud-speakers are often set up in the *minarets* to sound the call.)

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3A. Dome of the Royal Mosque in Isfahan

Mosques are not decorated with sculpture or pictures because there were to be no images of God or other figures that might be distracting. Instead they have abstract designs of geometric or floral patterns and bands of calligraphy, "beautiful writing." Often these designs are made from colored tiles, as they are here in this Persian example.

Can you find the floral pattern of vines and small leaves, called an *arabesque*, on the dome? Below it is a band of calligraphy in the angular *Kufic* style of writing in white on the turquoise background. On the lower part of the drum is a band of dark blue with white writing in the cursive *Naskhi* style. There are also pierced windows to let light inside.

4. Tile from a Prayer Niche

Because of the importance of ritual prayer, the niche facing Mecca, called the prayer niche or *mihrab*, is often beautifully decorated. This tile once decorated a *mihrab*. A verse mentioning praise from the Koran or religious sayings was molded in the clay. Then they were colored with dark cobalt blue. Leafy arabesques with tiny birds perched on them swirl around the letters. They are colored with dabs of turquoise and copper glaze. This lovely design suggests the garden of paradise (see also slides 9 and 14).

5. Bowl with Luster Glazes.

Geometry was a favorite form of design in Islamic art. This bowl has many geometric forms. Look for squares, octagons (eight-sided polygons), triangles, and small circles in this earthenware bowl. Notice how two squares overlapped create an eight-pointed star and an octagon. These complex, but ordered patterns suggested the richness and unity of God's universe. The artist has also added forms from nature; the flowers in the filler shapes between the stars and leaves the on the rim.

What colors do you see? The shiny copper and gold colors were made by using special metallic glazes. Clay decorated with this kind of glaze is called lusterware. It has the luster of polished metal.

6. Bowl with Kufic Script

This white bowl with black design comes from Samarkand, a city in Central Asia, a center of East-West trade. Remember that calligraphy, "beautiful writing," was a favorite form of decoration often used in Islamic art. The black lines here are Arabic letters, written in the Kufic script. They form a handsome design and write the message: "Take the middle road in your affairs: indeed, it is a Salvation. Don't ride too gentle a mount of too obstinate a one." Do you think that is good advice? What do you think of having a message like that as decoration on a bowl?

7. Bowl with Horse and Rider

The people of ancient Persia were great horsemen. Horses represented mobility, status, and military power. In Persian art kings and heroes are often shown on horseback.

In Islamic religious art there are no human or animal figures representing God, but in art that was not religious there are human figures. Still, designs and patterns are more important than realism. Notice the patterns on the rider's clothing and background. They do not describe the way real clothing fits or a natural setting. The square head with its overly large eye is also not realistic. The scattered Kufic letters are good luck wishes or blessings.

8. Architectural Panel with Persian Inscription

This piece of carved marble once decorated the palace of the King in Ghazni, a city in eastern Persia, now part of Afghanistan. (Look for this and other cities mentioned here on your map when you have a chance.) Originally, it was probably painted red and blue. Having looked at other Islamic art can you guess what the design is here? Yes, it's calligraphy and intertwined plant forms. The letters are not Arabic, but Persian, because this was a period, (eleventh-twelfth century) and area where there was a revival of Persian culture. Many poems and stories were written in Persian at this time, including a most famous tale called the *Shah-nama*, the Book of Kings (see also slide 18).

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9. Madrasa, Isfahan

This building is an Islamic school or *madrasa*, in Isfahan, Persia. Both boys and girls went to these religious schools. If they came from far away they lived at the school while they studied. There are rooms behind the smaller arches in the walls. Education was (and still is) important in Islamic culture.

Like the mosque, the *madrasa* has a dome, minarets, and the impressive arched entrance. Notice that it is also decorated with calligraphic and geometric designs, flowers, and the spiraling vines called arabesques.

Persians loved gardens. They designed very formal gardens with rectangular paths, pools or channels of water, trees, and beds of flowers. In this hot, dry, desert country a garden was like an oasis; cool, colorful, fragrant, and filled with the songs of birds. These gardens mirrored Paradise as it was described in the Koran.

10. Incense Burner

The use of perfumes and incense began in the Near East hundreds of years before the beginning of Islam. It continued to be part of the culture under Islam. Fragrant woods, oils, or herbs were burned in this pierced metalwork container. The sweet-smelling smoke would stream out of all the little holes, perfuming a room or a nobleman's clothing. Notice the dear little bird on the lid. It is the handle for opening the top to put the incense in and light it.

11. Blue and White Bowl

Pierced designs were also used on clay pieces. "Windows" of glaze (the word glaze refers to glass) cover the holes made in a border made of twisted strips of clay on this bowl.

This white bowl with its blue rim looks a little like Chinese porcelain. Because trade between China and Persia along the Silk Road each country learned and copied things from the other. Most of the cobalt, the mineral used to make this blue glaze, came from the Near East. In China it was sometimes called "Muhammadan Blue."

12. Bronze Mortar

This is a bronze mortar used by a doctor or pharmacist to grind ingredients used in medicine. It has a sturdy shape and strong, simple decoration of bosses (ornamental bumps), arabesques, and calligraphy. Muslim doctors led the world in medicine when medical science in Europe was largely based on myth and superstition. It was one of many sciences which were studied and advanced by Islamic scholars.

13. Figure of a Bird; a Hoopoe or *Simurgh*

This crested bird is both a real and an imaginary bird. There is a real bird called a hoopoe that lives in this part of the world. It is quite big and has a large crest which makes it look very special.

An imaginary bird, the *simurgh*, is also very special, even magical. In stories it helps heroes and other good people sometimes leading them out of danger. This figurine is therefore both a charming sculpture and a symbol of good luck.

The deep blue glaze is one of the rich gem-like glaze colors used at this time.

14. Bowl with Figure Near a Tree and Water

This lovely bowl was made for wealthy clients in ancient Persia. Its thin wall and delicate, colorful glazed decoration are too fragile for everyday use.

The simple tree and stylized water represent a garden in which the two figures kneel. You may remember that a garden represents paradise (slides 4 and 9). Numerous birds, believed to be messengers of God and bringers of good luck, fly, hover, and perch around the two figures. The Koran says that the righteous (good people) will dwell in gardens of everlasting bliss, with flowing rivers and springs, sweet smelling flowers, fruit trees, and other sensual delights.

15. Bowl with Arabesque and Endless Knot Design

Here is another elegant and delicate bowl. Its decoration is more abstract than the last one. From a star in the center colorful arabesques spiral outward.

The arabesque passes over silver-gray endless knot designs. The endless knot was an old, old symbol of interconnectedness (how everyone and everything is connected) and infinity (or boundlessness). In Persia, it was used in the Zoroastrian religion before the coming of Islam.

16. Star-shaped Tile with Border Inscription from the Koran.

In the thirteenth century, when this clay tile was made, cities were growing and many buildings were being built. Palaces, mosques, *madrasas*, and also large tomb buildings were going up. Many of them were beautifully decorated with colored tiles. Do you recognize the shape and glaze? This eight-pointed star is like those seen on the luster ware bowl (slide 5) The glaze on this star is also a luster glaze. The pattern on it has plant forms and geometric designs. The writing around the border is a verse from the Koran.

17. Jade Jewel Box

This small container is made of white jade. It might have been a jewel box holding a large gem or two or maybe a ring. It is decorated with carved bands of calligraphy. It brings wishes that the king's dynasty will last forever, "God willing." I

This king was the grandson of a very strong and creative conqueror named Timur, and Timur claimed he was a descended from the greatest conquer of all, the Mongol, Chinggis (Genghis) Khan. The Mongolian Empire connected China in the East with Persia and Europe in the West. One of the things Timur and his followers enjoyed from China was jade. The love of jade continued among his successors, the Mughals, who became the rulers of India in the sixteenth century. A second inscription in smaller Persian letters was added to the rim. It glorifies the Mughal Emperor Jahangir. Genealogy, or lineage, was very important to these rulers.

18. Page from a *Shah-nama* from India

Some of the Islamic rulers invaded India and brought their religion and culture with them. The *Shah-nama* was a book about all the kings and heroes of Persia from the beginning of time, popular all over the Islamic world, not just in Persia. Many copies of it were written and illustrated.

This is a page from a *Shah-nama*. Because it was produced in India, it combines both Persian and Indian styles. Persians had vertical books, Indians horizontal books. This page combines both, the whole vertical page with Persian writing and the horizontal picture. The figures and their costumes are Persian. The red hot colors, and the use of borders around separate parts of the picture are Indian.

Can you find the parasols over one figure? That is the sign of a King in India. The other man is Rustam, a Persian hero, who beat many enemies and demons. Notice that he is really much larger than the king. (Compare this with slide 1, a Mughal miniature, much more Persian in style.)

19. Logo of Sultan Suleyman the Magnificent

Asia Minor was also invaded by Islamic Turks. They brought their language and faith to the country now called Turkey. From the sixteenth to the nineteenth century Turkey's Ottoman Empire was one of the largest, richest, and strongest in the world. The kings, called Sultans, had elegant buildings, carpets (slide 2), paintings, textiles, and ceramics (slide 20) made to show off their wealth and power.

The sultans also had much business to conduct. To make sure that his orders were properly carried out, the Sultan Suleyman the Magnificent created this fancy logo. It had to be on all legal documents and orders to prove they were truly from him or his officials.

The logo is a fancy kind of signature. Is your signature plain or fancy? Could you make a beautiful design from the letters of your name?

20. Large Dish with Cypress, Tulips, and Other Flowers

Sultans collected Chinese porcelain. (Porcelain is the very hard, white ceramic that China made first and is sometimes called "china" or "chinaware.") They especially liked blue-and-white wares. The court designers were inspired by Chinese ceramics. They ordered similar designs from the potters of Iznik. Iznik plates, cups, and bowls were used for everyday use. "China ware" was used only for special occasions.

On this white plate the potter used the rich cobalt blue but also green and red for his design of flowers and tree. It might represent a paradise garden or just shows the Turks' love of flowers. There is a tall blue cypress tree, tulips, bluebells, and branches of flowering fruit trees.

Tulips were first introduced to Europe, and then to America, from Turkey.